Joshua Tree National Park Business Plan

Fiscal Year 2001

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Introduction

The purpose of business planning in the National Park Service is to improve the ability of parks to clearly communicate their financial status to their principal stakeholders. A business plan answers such questions as: What is the business of this park? How much money does it need to operate within appropriate standards? This plan demonstrates the park's functional responsibilities, operational standards, and financial picture.

The goal of the business planning process is to accomplish three main tasks. First, it provides the park with a synopsis of its funding history. Second, it presents a clear, detailed picture of current park operations and funding. Finally, it outlines park priorities and funding strategies for the future.

Parks apply a common method when developing a business plan. Park activities are organized into five functional areas that describe all areas of business for which a park is responsible. The functional areas are further broken down into 35 programs. This allows the park to move beyond the traditional National Park Service method of reporting expenditures in terms of fund sources, and instead report expenditures in terms of activities. As a result, the park can communicate its financial situation more clearly to external audiences. Furthermore, using the same 35-program structure for all parks provides a needed measure of comparison across all park units.

The process is facilitated by the use of a web-based application that allows parks to complete data collection, analysis, and document production with step-by-step instructions.

Completion of the business plan process not only enables a park to produce a powerful communication tool, but also provides park management with financial and operational baseline knowledge for future decision-making.

Superintendent's Foreword

It is the general sentiment of the American public that the value of our national parks cannot be measured, that they are priceless and deserve the highest level of protection. National Park Service managers struggle with the cost of meeting this admirable goal.

In today's world, maintaining park operations is equivalent to managing a community, township, or city. Park managers must manage available congressionally-appropriated funds and visitor fees to operate the park on a daily basis, to maintain the park's infrastructure and resources, and to invest for the future. Like many in the business world we employ a variety of business initiatives to meet growing fiscal demands and public expectations. For example, at Joshua Tree National Park, we have implemented cost-saving measures by reducing our reliance on conventional fuels and commercial utilities through the installation of solar power generating systems, by using electric and compressed natural gas powered vehicles, and by recycling waste. The gains in efficiency thanks to these initiatives are significant; however, a more comprehensive business approach for assessing parkwide operations is still necessary.

The National Park Service, in partnership with the National Parks Conservation Association, has developed a new business initiative for analyzing park operations. This business plan is a product of that partnership.

Business plans provide another perspective of park operations and an accounting of park financial and human resources. From this analysis, parks can define the financial and staff resources required to provide for the visitors' enjoyment and the protection of park resources. Importantly, business plans also enable park managers to look to the future and identify innovative strategies for reducing costs and raising new funds.

One thing is certain: the financial burden of sustaining park operations has increased significantly over the years and is expected to continue to grow.

Today's park managers will need to enlist the support of gateway communities, the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and the public, in order to find creative solutions for achieving sustainable park operations. This business plan is a bold and refreshing first step towards achieving that end.

Your thoughts and comments are welcome.

Superintendent Ernest Quintana

Executive Summary

This business plan is designed to identify and document the operational capabilities of Joshua Tree National Park. The key findings described in this plan show a gap between current funding of the park's operations and the funds necessary to fulfill the goals and mission of the National Park Service.

Joshua Tree National Park was first established as a national monument in 1936 and then became a national park in 1994. The park was established to preserve an ecologically dynamic region of the California Desert, a transition zone between the Colorado and Mojave Deserts. The park provides recreational opportunities to approximately 1.2 million visitors annually, and protects and preserves a rich array of natural and cultural resources.

Key Findings

- Base operations of the park are not funded sufficiently to meet the basic goals and mission of the park as defined by Congress. In fiscal year (FY) 2001, Joshua Tree National Park spent $6.0 million, while $8.6 million was needed to meet its operational and maintenance needs. This shortfall of $2.6 million represents 31% of the overall funding needed by the park. Insufficient funding results in the failure to achieve many of the park's primary goals. For example, the park cannot honor all requests for educational outreach programs, nor can it monitor all the species of special concern within the park. This plan also reveals that the park is increasing its reliance on non-recurring funding to pay for the day-to-day operations of the park.

- The functions most affected by the funding shortfall at Joshua Tree National Park are Resource Protection, Visitor Experience and Enjoyment, and Facility Operations. Only 62% of funds needed are available for these Resource Protection tasks. Visitor Experience and Enjoyment, which includes those programs designed to educate and protect visitors, is currently receiving only 66% of required funds. Facility Operations, which receives only 72% of its required funds, encompasses the day-to-day management of the park's infrastructure. Increased funding would allow the park to extend its operations to seven days a week to better meet visitor use needs.

- In FY 2001 the park spent $1.5 million to finance a number of investments. These are significant one-time expenditures for the development of the park's infrastructure and information base. The investments funded in 2001 included renovations of park headquarters and the Oasis Visitor Center, installation of solar power systems, and new visitor center exhibits. This plan also identifies a number of unfunded investment needs. The park's top eight investment priorities total $19.9 million and include rehabilitation of trails, campground roads, abandoned mine sites, and primary park roadways.

- Strategies to remedy the funding shortfall at the park rely on reducing costs through better application of resources and generating additional funding through partnerships and new revenue sources. The park will continue to implement a number of cost reduction strategies such as cost sharing with other parks and replacing diesel-generated and public utility electricity with photovoltaic (solar) energy systems.

The future is bright at Joshua Tree National Park. While additional base operating funds are needed, the park is committed to fulfilling its mission in the most efficient means available.

Visitors stroll past the kinetic sculpture at the park's newly-refurbished headquarters complex.

Park Overview

Joshua Tree Inventory

Natural Features
792,726 acres
585,040 acres of wilderness
Elevations from 536 to 5814 feet
712 plant species
40 reptile species
41 mammal species
240 bird species
1 federally threatened species (desert tortoise)
1 federally endangered species (Coachella Valley milk vetch)
26 species of special concern

Cultural and Historic Features
501 archeological sites
88 historic structures
19 cultural landscapes
123,253 items in the museum collection
1 paleontological area, 8 potential areas

Facilities
88 miles of paved roads
81 miles of unpaved roads
191 miles of hiking trails
32 trailheads
911 regulatory and 123 trail signs
9 campgrounds with 523 campsites
10 picnic areas with 38 picnic sites
10 water treatment facilities
9 solar power stations
4 maintenance facilities
8 employee housing units
95 vehicles in fleet
3 visitor centers

Two desert ecosystems merge within Joshua Tree National Park, creating unique associations of plants and animals. The Colorado Desert occupies the eastern half of the park where creosote bush, ocotillo, and palo verde dominate. The Mojave Desert spans the western half of the park and provides a higher, slightly cooler, and wetter habitat for Joshua trees. The Joshua tree is a critical component of the Mojave Desert ecosystem and provides habitat for birds, mammals, insects, and lizards. The park provides an escape from urban pressures, a place in which to experience solitude and wilderness areas, and a chance to explore those areas on foot.

Wildlife includes desert tortoises, rattlesnakes, bighorn sheep, golden eagles, desert iguanas, roadrunners, and a range of other species that represent important park resources. In recent years, the park has faced new challenges associated with urban sprawl such as degradation of air quality, increased levels of nitrogen in the soils, and human interaction with wildlife. The park is developing strategies to address the effects of these human influences.

Joshua trees and large boulders are characteristic of the Mojave Desert.

Despite the seeming vastness of the desert landscape, the park's ecosystems are fragile and marked by climatic extremes. Natural water sources in the park are scarce, and the land appears parched. Rainfall is infrequent, but sudden downpours occasionally inundate the land. The park offers remarkable geologic displays of exposed granite monoliths and rugged mountains of rock. Washes, playas, and alluvial fans coexist to form an extensive and complex desert mosaic. There are just 158 desert fan palm oases in North America—five of them are located within the park. Oases and natural springs support vegetation and wildlife distinct from the species found in the rest of the park.

In addition to its extensive natural resources, the park also offers a rich cultural history. During the wetter Pleistocene Era, the Pinto Culture lived in the Pinto Basin region as hunters and gatherers along what used to be a slow-moving river. Several American Indian groups lived in the area after Pinto Culture; traces of their existence include petroglyphs, pictographs, and ceramic pottery found in washes and among rock formations. In the late 1800s prospectors, cattle ranchers, and miners arrived in the desert. These

Park Mission Statement

The National Park Service at Joshua Tree National Park preserves and protects a representative area of the Colorado and Mojave Deserts and the natural and cultural resources for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The park strives to maintain its rich biological and geological diversity, cultural history, recreational resources, and outstanding opportunities for scientific study.

Enabling Legislation

On August 10, 1936, Presidential Proclamation No. 2193 created Joshua Tree National Monument, consisting of 825,340 acres. In 1950, the size of the monument was reduced by almost 300,000 acres as areas containing mineral reserves were excluded from federal protection. On October 31, 1994, the California Desert Protection Act (Public Law 103-433) added 234,000 acres to Joshua Tree National Monument and changed its status from a national monument to a national park.

settlers built dams and mines; their remnants are found at Ryan Ranch, Desert Queen Mine, Barker Dam, and Desert Queen Ranch, which are all popular visitor destinations today. In the 1930s, aided by the construction of new roads and the advancement of the automobile, homesteaders moved into the desert region. As settlers claimed homesteads on desert tracts, increased human contact began to impact the fragile desert ecosystems.

These stresses to the desert landscape inspired Minerva Hamilton Hoyt, a Pasadena native, to work for the protection of the desert and the creation of a national monument. She worked to bring national attention to the issue of desert protection, and was instrumental in helping to establish Joshua Tree National Monument in 1936.

Located 140 miles east of Los Angeles and just north of Palm Springs, the park follows visitation patterns associated with those of an urban park. Visitors come to Joshua Tree National Park to bird-watch, backpack, hike, camp, horseback ride, and rock climb. The park is recognized worldwide as a climbing destination with more than 4,500 established climbing routes concentrated within approximately 100,000 acres of land in the western section of the park. During wet years, the park offers a vivid display of wildflowers, attracting a higher numbers of visitors.

Exploding rates of population and economic growth in Southern California have transformed Joshua Tree National Park into an ecological region surrounded by freeways, highways, industrial sites, cities, and planned communities. Expansion of human activities along park boundaries has created new challenges for the park managers in terms of protecting park resources, mitigating visitor impact, and minimizing the incompatible use of boundary areas.

Visitors interested in birdwatching, wildlife viewing, or a cool place to rest on a hot afternoon head for one of Joshua Tree's five fan palm oases.

Joshua Tree National Park Map